



BY ADAM PARFREY

A vicious sort of urban legend began to flourish about the time of Richard Gere's alleged dalliance with rectal rodents. Its subject was Steven Spielberg, and the gossip had to do with the director's overweening fascination with child actors. Mindful that hearsay is sometimes false, we are withholding the delicious details. But the fact that this rumor exists at all confirms an underlying unease over the presumably innocent entertainments created by Hollywood's oldest *Wunderkind*.

Spielberg's latest theme park-style extravaganza, *Jurassic Park*, isn't as explicitly swishy as his failed *Hook*, but it reveals components of the auteur's personality that have parents wondering about the movie's appropriateness for children.

King Kong, *The Lost World*, and *Godzilla*, three monster epics cannibalized by *Jurassic Park*, achieved their thrills without resorting to on-screen menacing of tots. Indeed, only on milk cartons can we find children so psychically raped as the celluloid juveniles of *Jurassic Park*. The film's sadistic tone is established early on, when a fat child challenges the paleontological theories of protagonist Sam Neill. Neill turns on the boy, and in low, menacing tones, he demonstrates to the child how a prehistoric nasty would mangle and devour him. Adding a distinctly Peter Kürtenish *frisson*, Neill slashes near the child's belly and crotch with a large, sharp claw.

Perhaps among all our "childlike" wonderment with the subject of dinosaurs, we forget that child abusers commonly invoke the threat of large beasts to frighten and silence their victims. Is the director conjuring the trappings of childhood obsessions only to wield them for a darker purpose?

Although overtly sadistic, *Jurassic Park* was reined in by its obeisance to special effects; it revealed few of the excesses of *Hook*, in which Spielberg's psychodramatic inclinations were allowed to roam free. *Hook* is the culmination of over a decade of false starts in bringing J.M. Barrie's *Peter Pan* to the screen. At first, Spielberg was reportedly considering a live-action redo of the Disney animated feature, starring Michael Jackson as the perpetual pre-pube. But the auteur of suburban childhood wasn't satisfied with a simple remake.

The high-concept Hollywood sound bite, "What if Peter Pan grew up?"

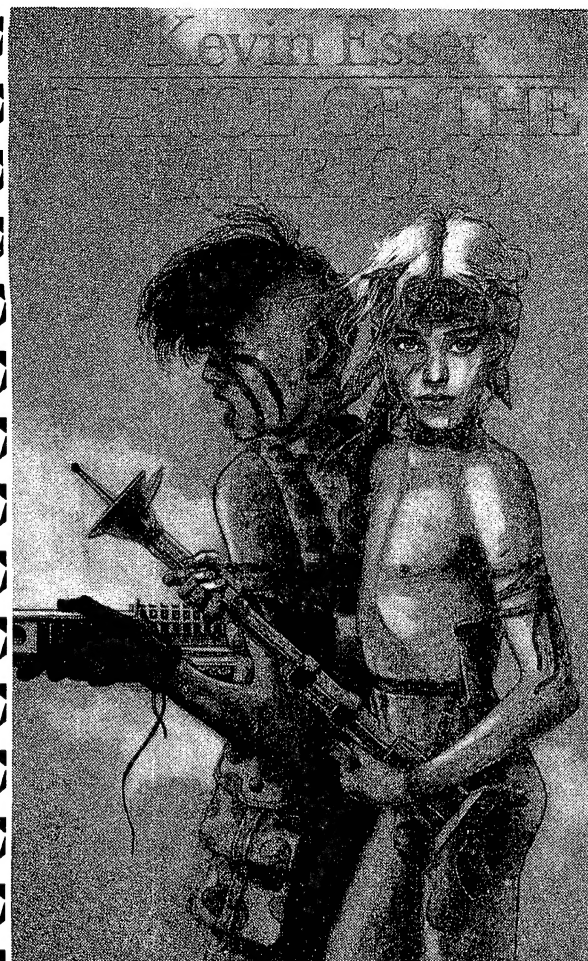
not only indulged Spielberg's predilections, it provided the film's investors with a tinklingly trendy phrase redolent with the "recovery" metaphysics that have become the ethos for Hollywood's *haut monde*, the same *haut monde* who have lately forsworn the continual cocaine-and-Quaalude concatenations so relentlessly documented by former Spielberg producer Julia Phillips in her autobitchography, *You'll Never Eat Lunch in This Town Again*.

The recovery movement is led in part by ex-drunk John Bradshaw, who smilingly encourages his readers to throw off the ruinous shackles of adulthood in order to "liberate the inner child." It comes as little surprise that Steven Spielberg takes part in Bradshaw's therapies, which include workshops where "lullaby music is played and participants cradle or stroke one another." Asking Steven Spielberg to liberate his inner child would be akin to asking a serial murderer to actualize his anger. By his own admission, Stevie has experienced little in the way of adulthood outside of his overprotective upbringing and the adulatory, toadying fantasy land of Hollywood. Bradshaw's "inner child" therapy is a mere baby-step away from the Diaper Pail Fraternity, a Sausalito-based group for grown men who revert to incontinent infancy, where surrogate mommies exclaim and coo as they wipe the kinky kid-fetishists' dirty behinds.

Spielberg's *Hook* is redolent not only of the inner-child component of recovery, but also its darker aspect: child molestation. Bradshaw seeks to place blame for psychological malaise on a dimly remembered past in which some form of traumatic abuse took place. The less the so-called abuse is remembered, the more convinced are Bradshawian therapists that it actually occurred. At the time that *Hook* went into production, all the radio and television talk shows fixated upon child abuse in a catharsis of mass scapegoating. Suddenly, millions of Americans were convinced that they had been molested by their nuclear family or ritually abused by Satanists.

On the crest of the child-abuse wave, Spielberg's Peter Pan project was transformed into *Hook*, whose ad campaign abandoned the traditional flying fairies in lieu of a stark visual of the prosthetic steel claw gleaming against a black background. The gruesome hieroglyphic was a perfect mnemonic device—see hook, think *Hook*—but more importantly, it transferred any possible pedophilic overtones from Spielberg himself





Queer coincidences: pre-pubescent freedom-fighters in the pedophilic fantasy novel Dance of the Warriors oddly resemble the Lost Boys of Hook (upper left and right); gay body-painting ad is strangely similar to the Lost Boys' affectionate daubing of Robin Williams (lower left and right).

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(the auteur hero) to the classically pederastic fantasy figure of Captain James Hook, the fiend who spirits children away to a Neverland where Cabbage Patch foundlings enliven the sodomitical lives of Village People pirates. Here, Spielberg could be evading responsibility for his alleged tendencies by projecting them onto his villain, a strategy employed by Hitchcock and other directors renowned for their sadistic inclinations.

Peter Pan had, of course, become such a dusty chestnut that almost no one would object to its pedophilic content. Who would remember that its author, Sir James Barrie, was a full-blown boy fancier who never consummated his marriage to actress Mary Ansell and carried on a passionate "friendship" with the sons of Sylvia and Arthur Llewelyn Davies? Even today, no one can comfortably explain why Barrie had insisted on naming his eternal child "Pan," after the goatish satyr of mythology. In a tradition begun by Sir Barrie, most stage productions of *Peter Pan* cast a boyish woman in the lead role, a transvestite tradition Spielberg may well have paid homage to by casting Glenn Close as the bearded pirate named "Gutless."

Pederastic organizations such as NAMBLA insist that children are wise, sexual creatures who should be given the opportunity to be fondled, sucked, and anally penetrated by middle-aged men. The *NAMBLA Bulletin* has a special column called "Boys in the Media," tracking the doings of such Hollywood chickens as Macaulay Culkin, known affectionately in the *Bulletin* as "Mac." The self-described "Gany-median" L. Martin, who writes the "Boys in the Media" column, spoke by phone about Steven Spielberg and *Hook*.

"Spielberg is known for his interest in young boys, certainly," said Martin. "A lot of the members have been talking about *Hook*, telling me how much they enjoyed it." NAMBLA spokesman Renato Corazza refused to confirm or deny Spielberg's possible membership in the Man/Boy Love Association: "We don't divulge our membership rolls." And is it merely accidental that another pederastic magazine goes by the acronym P.A.N. (*Paedo Alert News*)?

Spielberg's costume designer Anthony Powell endows *Hook*'s "Lost Boys" with a cute Benetton-meets-Oliver Twist look tailor-made for the chicken-hawk sensibility. *Dance of the Warriors*, a futuristic fantasy about a warrior cult of young boys who fight right-wing Christians for the privilege of having sex with aging boy-lovers, sports on its cover a salt-and-pepper boy couple who almost precisely mirror two of Spielberg's Lost Boys. The book appeared in the pedophilia sections of gay bookstores just at the time that *Hook* was going into pre-production.

Just who are Spielberg's Lost Boys? Walter

Keanè-style big-eyed orphans? *Lord of the Flies* in Suburbialand? *Hook*'s smarmy press kit tries to make each personality distinct. There's *Rufio* ("the proud leader of the Lost Boys, whose determined jousting with Peter for the honor of guiding the troupe of ruffians leads to a new understanding between the two rivals in Neverland"); *Ace* ("the Lost Boy with all the angles figured out for his peers"); *Thudbutt* ("whose imposing size belies his gentle disposition among the Lost Boys—but don't get him angry!"); *No Nap* ("a street urchin complete with suspenders, knickers, a newsboy cap... and a heart of roughened gold"); *Latchboy* ("the curly-top redhead who always finds himself in the thick of any mischief contrived by the band of tarnished angels"); *Pockets* ("one of the smallest Lost Boys, who has a particular soft spot for helping Peter get his wings in Neverland"); and *Too Small* ("the tiniest Lost Boy in stature but one of the feistiest in nature, who wears his pajamas through thick and thin").

Hook's emotional highlight, strangely absent from the shooting script's first revised draft, is the touchy-feely communion of the adult Peter Pan and the Lost Boys. We're treated to prolonged takes of the tykes touching and caressing Robin Williams's face and body. When the Lost Boys smear war paint on Williams's naked torso, the idyll is reminiscent of a certain gay body-painting video advertised in *The Advocate* "that focuses on creative eroticism, that expands and extends the beauty of foreplay."

There's not room enough to detail the pedophilic implications of other Spielberg productions: the man/boy relationship in

Empire of the Sun, which begins with John Malkovich's comment about young Christian Bale's "sweet mouth" and reaches its emotional climax when Malkovich directs the chicken to move his cot next to his; the child-alien/human ectodermal interactions in *Close Encounters*; and the sanitized incest theme of *Back to the Future*. However, it was *E.T.*, Spielberg's most exalted triumph, which seems to clothe boy-love fantasy in New Age vestments. Spielberg uses every trick in the director's chapbook to induce us to love a wrinkled, potbellied cosmic interloper that hides in boys' closets and communicates with a glowing, phallic finger. It was young Henry Thomas's taunt to his twelve-year-old celluloid brother—"penis breath"—that had Spielberg conjure, if only for a disturbing instant, the image of a bald-faced lad with a cock in his mouth.

Although the "negligent" participants got off with nary a knuckle-rap, we must not forget that Spielberg also produced the actual snuff film *The Twilight Zone*, in which Vic Morrow and two young children were beheaded during filming.

Perhaps the most perverse aspect of Steven Spielberg's work is its obsessive posture of sentimental innocence. Psychologists trained in the vocabulary of sex criminals often note the cloak of goo-goos and sugar frosting as the subconscious moral gymnastics of repression and guilt transference. But now that *Jurassic Park* has more openly revealed the overtly sadistic aspect of Steven Spielberg's curious desires, there is only one more place to go for this self-styled avatar of contemporary myth. His upcoming movie, *Schindler's List*, was filmed in Auschwitz. ■

